

SUSTAINABLE CHICAGO

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Web Portal Helps Affordable Housing Become Greener

Posted By [Matt Baker](#) On June 10, 2010 @ 11:29 am | [No Comments](#)

For small community organizations without much experience in sustainable building, navigating the sea of funding options to find the best fit for an affordable housing project can be as challenging as the grant applications themselves. To help close the information gap in this field, nonprofit housing lender Chicago Community Loan Fund (CCLF) has launched the latest resource for community developers: a new web resource at www.greenaffordable.org ^[1] called Building For Sustainability: Resources for Sustainable Building in Chicagoland.

Visitors to the site browse three broad topic categories: "Chicagoland Resources," which contains lists of financial resources organized by type of project (new construction, brownfield, predevelopment, etc.); "Affordable is Sustainable," containing an extensive collection of informative articles on different aspects of the development process and "News & Publications," compiling the top publications from New Ecology, Inc., Global Green USA and the City of Chicago, among others.



The pressure on community developers to keep their housing construction budgets as low as possible often leads affordable housing builders to dismiss sustainable products and processes as too expensive, even if their use in a project would lead to long-term energy savings. It is for this builder that the "Chicagoland Resources" section was developed. Building for Sustainability approaches

funding opportunities from the perspective of a developer or community organization new to issues of sustainability.

Available resources include grants for new, energy-efficient construction from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, and free assessments of existing buildings by the Center for Neighborhood Technology to identify potential areas of energy savings. There are also links to various government funding sites, as well as the Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency (DSIRE). Funding opportunities are categorized under simple labels like energy efficiency, land and brownfields, renewable energy, renovation and preservation.

Grants and low-cost services like the above enable builders to make their projects more economically viable—as well as sustainable—since an informed investment in energy-efficiency measures up front can lower energy expenses for decades. The collection of resources on the site allows builders to see exactly how green design elements can be made affordable for community developers.

Luckily, sustainability is not limited to high-visibility and high-cost features—like vegetative roofs and geothermal heating—that require outside funding. An affordable housing builder who opts for cheap, long-lasting compact fluorescent light bulbs instead of incandescents, low-VOC paints and permeable pavement tiles instead of concrete in the parking lot can proudly declare that he is committed to the long-term health of both his residents and the environment. The glossary of the Building For Sustainability website contains information on these and other effective, low-cost, sustainable techniques for affordable housing developers.

Although the Building For Sustainability site remains committed primarily to resources and news for the Chicago area, it draws from a variety of relevant information nationwide. CCLF hopes to help Chicago's affordable housing developers take advantage of the cost savings and health benefits of sustainable building by helping local developers and community advocates easily find local funding opportunities, compare the cost-effectiveness of sustainable building strategies and review relevant local information.

Over the past eight years, CCLF has worked closely with area builders and developers to create policy recommendations and resources regarding best practices in the field of affordable and sustainable housing. In 2001, CCLF released its first guide on the subject, which was followed in 2008 by a revised edition co-produced with the Delta Institute. The Building for Sustainability website replaces the paper publications with a format that can reflect the fast pace of innovation in the field.

The creation of the Building For Sustainability website was supported by funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as well as the Citi Foundation. The site was designed in partnership with Tamarack Media, a full-service multimedia production company based in Montpelier, Vermont. Tamarack specializes in helping nonprofit organizations and green businesses educate, communicate and advocate on a wide spectrum of environmental issues.

CCLF supports community development organizations throughout metropolitan Chicago—especially emerging, small and midsize community developers—providing low-cost, flexible financing and hands-on technical assistance for affordable housing, social service and economic development initiatives that benefit low- to moderate-income neighborhoods and families. As a nonprofit revolving loan fund founded in 1991, CCLF provides financing for development projects promising high social impact that for-profit, regulated financial institutions generally do not or cannot provide.

-Jesse Davis and Kate McInerney
Photo courtesy of EPA Smart Growth

CCLF encourages you to visit their new resource site at <http://greenaffordable.org> ^[2] and welcomes your comments, suggestions and questions emailed to info@cclfchicago.org.

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[1] www.greenaffordable.org: <http://www.sustainable-chicago.com>www.greenaffordable.org

[2] <http://greenaffordable.org>: <http://greenaffordable.org>

